

**U.S.-Mexico Border 2012 Environmental Program
Texas-Coahuila-Nuevo Leon-Tamaulipas Regional Workgroup Meeting
August 28, 2003 from 10:00 AM to 5:00 PM
Holiday Inn-Civic Center
800 Garden Street, Laredo Texas 78040**

Minutes of the August 28, 2003 meeting of the Border 2012 Program Regional Workgroup Texas-Coahuila-Nuevo Leon-Tamaulipas Regional Workgroup

Welcome and Introductions

The Master of Ceremonies for the morning plenary session was Miguel Flores, Director of the EPA Water Quality Protection Division and Co-Chair of the Workgroup. The main table included the 4 Co-Chairs of the Workgroup:

- C Lic. Sergio E. Avilés, Director General, Coahuila Institute of Ecology
- C Dr. Alfonso Martínez, Federal Delegate in Nuevo León, Secretariat for Environment and Natural Resources (SEMARNAT)
- C Ralph Marquez, Commissioner, Texas Commission on Environmental Quality
- C Miguel Flores, EPA.

Also joining them at the table were Omar Rodríguez, Director for Northern Border Affairs SEMARNAT; C. Oscar Hinojosa, General Director, Sustainable Development of the State of Tamaulipas; Ing. Felipe Chapa, Director of Natural Resources, SEDUE Tamaulipas; and Lic. Alejandra Goyenechea O., Director of International Affairs, PROFEPA.

209 people registered and attended the meeting. Attendees represented all four states (Texas, Coahuila, Nuevo León and Tamaulipas) and even a couple of visitors from San Diego, California were present. Many participants drove more than three hours to attend the meeting, since this Regional Workgroup covers such a large area.

The general meeting started at 10:00 AM with a welcome to the participants and opening remarks by Miguel Flores. Mr. Flores highlighted the great importance of this first meeting of the Workgroup, adding that it included as many stakeholders, from diverse sectors and locations in our region, as possible.

Update by Border 2012 Partners

Lic. Sergio E. Avilés de la Garza gave a presentation on the Border 2012 partners. Lic. Avilés stated that this program is a border partnership consisting not only of the four Co-chairs, but also by the border states and tribes, and all the stakeholders along the border. The program is designed to work from a bottom-up approach, reaching the grassroots of society, municipalities, local groups, and the general public, which will assist the Co-Chairs in the setting priorities for the program's projects and activities.

Summary of past accomplishments under Border XXI

Dr. Martínez presented some major accomplishments of the previous binational program – Border XXI.

Dr. Martínez highlighted the following projects:

- C Air quality–creation of the Joint Advisory Committee for the Improvement of Air Quality in the El Paso County-Ciudad Juárez-Doña Ana Air Basin
- C Contingency planning and emergency response–several sister cities along the border had signed joint contingency plans
- C Environmental health–a Lower Rio Grande Cross-Border Air Pollution Project and a Pediatric Lead Exposure Initiative had been completed.
- C Pollution prevention–implementation of recommendations from 21 site assistance visits to maquiladoras had resulted in a reduction from 1994-2002 of 9,600 tons of hazardous waste, 88,600 pounds of volatile organic compounds, and 57,400 tons of nonhazardous waste
- C Water–Potable water services in Mexico's border region had increased from 88 percent to 93 percent, and the population whose wastewater is now treated had increased from 34 percent to 75 percent.

Summary of previous public meetings–Commissioner Ralph Marquez

Commissioner Marquez emphasized that the Border 2012 Program did not start from ground zero, acknowledging the work communities and agencies were doing. Commissioner Marquez also summarized the series of public meetings held along the border in several Sister Cities along the U.S.-Mexico border. These meetings were conducted in order to gather comments on environmental related issues at the local level. Some of the issues that were mentioned at the public meetings in this region included lack of water, inadequate tire disposal options, and agriculture issues, such as eradication of salt cedar.

Proposed Regional Workgroup and Task Force Operation–Dr. Martínez

Dr. Alfonso Martínez then gave a presentation on the proposed operations for Regional Workgroup and Task Forces. Dr. Martínez emphasized that each Workgroup should strive to build consensus on priorities, identify leadership, ensure adequate representation of stakeholders, support development of indicators, leverage resources, and prioritize regional environmental issues. In addition, he mentioned that Workgroups should recommend issues beyond their regional scope to the Border-wide Workgroups and/or Policy Forums. He also emphasized that Border 2012 coordinating bodies may create Task Forces to address specific regionally-and community-identified concerns, to implement site-specific projects, or to address issue-specific concerns.

In particular, Dr. Martínez proposed, on behalf of the Texas-Coahuila-Nuevo Leon-Tamaulipas Regional Workgroup Co-Chairs, the creation of eight Task Forces for this Workgroup. Six of these Task Forces will be based on the goals of the program including: air, water, land, environmental health, emergency preparedness, environmental compliance and enforcement. Two others identified environmental education and agriculture as important issues in the region.

Dr. Martínez stated that meeting participants would be invited to participate in breakout sessions of each Task Force and to discuss the six goals and objectives of the program. Task Force meetings would be open to the public, and participants could select the Task Force(s) they wish to attend based on their specific interest, issues or on local initiatives they would like to address. In addition, to facilitate Task Force communication and communication with the Regional Workgroup Co-Chairs, participants were required to identify two leaders, one from Mexico and one from the U.S., for each Task Force.

Dr. Martínez presented the Draft Operational Guidance intended to designate minimum standard operating procedures for all Workgroups/Policy Forums and Task Forces. Task force leaders will direct the Task Force to achieve the intended objectives, as well as logistical and administrative issues outlined in the Draft Operational Guidance.

Dr. Martínez also discussed financial support for the program. Besides federal sources, finances would need to be leveraged in order to successfully meet the goals and objectives of the Program. These resources should be available from state and local governments and from the private sector, as well as from bilateral and multilateral financing and lending institutions like the NADBank. Task Forces will be expected to develop project proposals and identify proposed funding sources. In support of this, coordinating bodies (Co-Chairs) will also develop open and competitive multi-year project funding mechanisms for Task Forces that take into account the need to utilize a wide-range of funding sources.

Break-out Sessions by Proposed Task Forces

After the opening plenary session, participants convened in eight different break-out sessions, by Task Force. The day before the Regional Workgroup meeting (August 27), previously selected facilitators (one each from the U.S. and Mexico) for each of the proposed Task Forces met to discuss the Border 2012 program and to go over their roles in the break-out sessions for the following day. The facilitators were identified by staff of the four co-chairs and/or the co-chairs themselves.

Task Force facilitators were asked to accomplish the following tasks during the initial break-out sessions:

- Proposed organization of the Task Force;
- Who is the temporary Task Force Leaders (one from Mexico and one from the U.S.);
- When will the next proposed Task Force meeting and/or activity take place and how they will accomplish outreach activities;
- Which were the key priorities and/or issues (or projects) to recommend to the Workgroup Co-Chairs; and
- Complete, as much as possible, the Workplans for each Task Force.

After meeting individually, the Task Forces reported out to the plenary session on their individual meeting. The following brief summary highlights these individual Task Force reports. The complete draft reports and minutes for each session are available at the Web site at www.epa.gov/usmexicoborder.

Task Force Reports

Task Force on Goal #1: Reduce Water Contamination - After much discussion, participants decided to address the following activities. 1) Prioritize projects to optimize the use of scarce grant funds; 2) Promote the use of self-help projects; 3) Optimize utility performance; 4) Insure that development-related rules are appropriate; 5) Enforce Rules and regulations; 6) Promote appropriate (less complex) technology in Mexico; 7) Promote understanding of the true cost of water; and, 8) Promote rates that foster conservation.

Task Force on Goal #2: Reduce Air Pollution - In defining a baseline and alternative scenarios for emissions reductions along the border and their impacts on air quality and human exposure, this Task Force reported the following proposed actions: 1) Develop an air basin waste load evaluation model to determine how much contaminants can be discharged to the air on a basin wide, not state specific, basis; 2) By 2003, integrate air quality measurement data in a harmonized way, making data available to everyone via the web, such as currently provided for the TCEQ air stations; 3) Ask local governments to work in developing a better method of collecting and sharing air emission inventories and allow for season variables; 4) Establish air emission inventories to ensure that we are able to capture not only particulate matter but also toxics, particularly from refineries in Monterrey and Reynosa, and also establish jurisdiction for conducting the emissions inventory; and, 5) Once toxics are identified, study possible health effects in the population and increased morbidity and mortality within a target population. Residents would also benefit from understanding the cost of increased air pollution as it affects our everyday life.

From 2004, based on results from preceding objectives, this task Force wants to get defined specific emission reduction strategies and air quality and exposure objectives to be achieved by 2012 through the following actions: 1) Establish smoke reduction strategies when agricultural burning can take place in Mexico, the smoke from which may impact the border; 2) Attempt to establish burn control regulations such as those already utilized by the sugar cane industry in the Lower Rio Grande Valley; 3) Promote conversion of vehicles in large fleets to alternative fuels, particularly governmental entities, beginning with federal agencies; this will also require the establishment of infrastructure for distribution of alternative fuel. There is a question about the requirement of federal agencies (in the U.S.) to use alternative fuel vehicles in attainment areas; and 4) Develop incentives to convert vehicles to natural gas. Consider targeting mass transportation systems and taxicabs for conversion, perhaps when they obtain new operating permits.

Task Force on Goal #3: Reduce Land Contamination - Priorities established by this Task Force were: 1) Work toward the productive use of light manufacturing land. Through remediation, it could be certified as clean and determined if it can be used for the same end again or expropriated for government facilities or green spaces; 2) SEMARNAT will continue working on the characterization of contaminated sites along the border, its modalities and possible remediation; 3) Make clear the difference between an abandoned site and illegal collection centers of toxic waste; and 4) Address all the issues both countries should consider -in getting all elements for policymaking.

Based on the above priorities, actions were recommended and follows: Sponsor a meeting of a group of experts on restoration or remediation to define methodologies, preventive legislation for remediation of contaminated sites, as well as its correlation to expected productive uses; Establish compensatory measures for deforestation, erosion, and habitat fragmentation. Determine and address erosion control

by activity type, as examples, the Cuenca de Burgos natural gas field, mesquite, uncontrolled tree felling, intensive ranching, and abandoned agricultural lands.

Addressing the problem of scrap tire dumping, this Task Force reached consensus on intending the following actions: Reduce scrap tire quantity with no treatment; Exhaustive research on scrap tire disposal, recycling and reuse methods; Obtain the available inventory and diagnostic map on rural and urban areas; Involve tire manufacturers in final disposal; and Create city regulations (impose a tax on scrap tire collection or charge/pay people for taking scrap tires to city collection centers).

Task Force on Goal #4: Improve Environmental Health - Some strategies to lower air pollution in urban areas are proposed: 1) Establishment of a monitoring system and to inform the public about air quality on a daily basis and verify data from known emission sites; 2) Perform vehicle emission inspections and periodic supervision of vehicle inspection centers; license automotive repair shops to perform vehicle emission inspections; 3) Modify industries emission regulations to make the standards more rigid; 4) Promote research and evaluation studies regarding air and noise pollution; 5) Seek funding for the development of projects focusing priority issues based on scientific and technological knowledge; 6) Leverage technology transference among national and international organizations; 7) Promote environmental education focusing on air and noise pollution and its effects on human health; and 8) Create university graduate-level programs on environmental issues.

Task Force on Goal #5: Reduce Exposure to Chemicals as a Result of Accidental Chemical Releases and/or Acts of Terrorism.- Main priorities discussed were: emergency evacuation; communication between agencies; lessons learned from exercises; lack of equipment in Mexico; training/awareness levels; specific communication between cities in Mexico and the U.S.; MOUs/Sister City Plans; the need for one person who can push that “trigger” and get aid from the other country sooner; and, communication equipment compatible that is compatible between each pair of sister cities.

Task Force on Goal #6: Improve Environmental Performance Through Compliance, Enforcement Pollution Prevention and Promotion of Environmental Stewardship - Main priorities discussed were as follows: 1) Identify all high-risk-labeled facilities on the border area; 2) In Laredo, Texas identify existent warehouse facilities containing toxic materials and/or toxic waste; 3) Conduct an inventory of toxic-waste contaminated sites; 4) Promote environmental audits on small and micro business; and, 5) Include other government and government administrated agencies in the next meeting.

Task Force #7 on Agriculture - Members of this Task Force stated three main objectives:

Objective # 1 - Educate public on integrated pesticide management (IPM) and proper use/disposal of pesticides. The main priority is to lower the highest public health risk by means of reducing potential toxic exposure, reducing potential water contamination, and reducing potential pesticide exposure. Activities will include: Outreach meetings; demonstration on proper use of pesticides followed up by an evaluation of actions through indicators, such as the number of exposures reported, number of complaints, and number of people reached. Stakeholders and beneficiaries to identify will be producer organizations, producers, and young children. In regard to communication, outreach, & reporting requirements this Task Force would support keeping a log of pesticide use & disposal of containers and also track informational pieces distributed.

Objective #2 on Improving Water use Efficiency - Activities to be undertaken: Harvest more rain-water, improve delivery systems and the use of water efficient crops. Possible performance indicators to measure progress and results would be: resource conservation, production INC/DEC, habitat diversification/sustainability, and ecological changes. Stakeholders and beneficiaries would be: communities, industry, and citizenry. These activities would require communication, outreach and reporting through community meetings and news media information dissemination.

Objective #3 on Land reclamation - Main priorities stated to reduce the highest public health risk were: To improve air quality, reduce erosion, reduce salt problems, and cover crops. Major planned activities/milestones planned are the increased use of land breaks, increased use of riparian [this doesn't make sense; something is missing here], and increase use of buffers. Designated stakeholders are all citizens and water users. Information to them would flow through public meetings and news releases.

Task Force # 8 on Environmental Education - Participants ranked objectives by priorities, placing water first, then environmental Performance, and then exposure to chemicals. They also listed several activities to be pursued, as follows: Review, select and catalogue existing materials and programs (for each priority topic); create networks; select sites to implement pilot and extended projects; organize workshops and activities to disseminate information about environmental regulations; disseminate information about local ecology, the watershed, etc.; train grassroots environmental education (EE) groups; create a directory of specialists able to address various topics from an EE perspective; identify specific local environmental problems; and identify sources of private funding.

This Task Force agreed to the following, based on available funding: 1) Conduct a Workshop on the Border Environmental Education Program. (Sep – Nov) \$ 6,000 for 2003. All participants in the EE Table will be invited, as well as more participants from Texas; 2) Train local educators in the border states (Jan – April) \$ 16,000, 2004; 3) To create a permanent network (January –September) \$10,000 and 2003- 2004 \$10,000; 4) Develop 3 local workshops by state (12 workshops, \$2,000 per workshop) and \$ 24,000, 2003- 2004; 5) To hold two task-force meetings per year (4 meetings over the next 2 years) \$ 8,000, 2003- 2004, and 6) Create an EE clearinghouse \$3,000. Total amount for all projects selected are for \$67,000.

Next Steps

After the Task Forces completed their meetings, the participants re-convened in a general plenary session that started at approximately 3:30 p.m. Commissioner Ralph Marquez moderated the afternoon session.

After a brief summary presentation by each of the Task Forces, C. Oscar Hinojosa Sánchez referred to the next steps necessary for the continuation of this meeting's endeavor, by encouraging Task Forces to continue to meet and make final selections of their two Task Force Co-Chairs (one from Mexico and the other from the U. S.). C. Hinojosa pointed out that Task Force Co-Chairs will assist the Border 2012 Workgroup and its Co-Chairs to achieve the intended Goal of the Workgroup. In turn the Workgroup Co-Chairs will assist and support the Task Forces with logistical and administrative resources. C. Hinojosa stressed that Task Forces meetings should be open to the public unless confidential discussions are deemed necessary for the effective pursuit of the objectives (such as in the case of the Enforcement Task Force), and must announce their meetings no less than 14 calendar days prior to the meeting date,

but 30 days was preferable. Mr. Hinojosa encouraged task force leaders and its members to maintain and leverage participation in non-border grant and other funding opportunities.

Closing

Comm. Marquez closed the meeting at approximately 5 p.m.